

Mayor Leads St. Pauls Delegation as NC STEP process begins

Written by Administrator

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[From the St. Pauls Review Newspaper.....](#)

RALEIGH — Mayor Buddy Westbrook led a delegation to Raleigh June 6 and 7 to begin St. Pauls' official journey through a two-year revitalization process with the N.C. Rural Economic Development Center.

During ceremonies on June 7, Gov. Beverly Perdue and Rural Center President Billy Ray Hall presented Mayor Westbrook a plaque recognizing St. Pauls as a participant in the N.C. Small Towns Economic Prosperity Program.

Joining Westbrook in representing the town were Olga Westbrook, Karen Weindel, Suzanne Malloy, Stuart Turille, Sue Hudson and Rufo Almazo.

St. Pauls also was recognized with a brick bearing the town's name on the Rural Center's Town Square. On the Town Square, part of a courtyard at the center, a sundial is surrounded by bricks bearing the names of the 67 towns that have participated in NC STEP since the program was launched in 2006.

St. Pauls was one of 11 towns selected to join the program this year.

"You've got to inspire your people to believe that good things can happen in little bitty places," Perdue told them during the ceremony.

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“This process will bring together people who truly believe in the value of your town and what it can become,” said Dan Ryan, a town council member from Maysville in Jones County, but there will be obstacles. “STEP challenges business as usual,” he said. “It means change, and change is scary.”

The Representatives stated that the process is driven from the ground up and requires a strong involvement **from all citizens**, in order to be successful.

NC STEP assists small towns on the path to economic renewal. It incorporates community coaching, leadership training, planning assistance and grants. The next steps for St. Pauls include the creation of a leadership team, which must represent all sections of the community, and a kickoff event to increase awareness of the program and invite widespread participation. The kick-off event is scheduled to coincide with the Night Out event, the second Saturday of September.

Towns that joined the program earlier have seen over 1,800 volunteers participate in the strategic planning process and project implementation. Approximately 660 jobs were created through the first 200 projects implemented. The volunteers also have learned to find and leverage resources, totaling nearly \$19 million so far. Through these efforts, they see community pride and growing optimism that their towns can have a brighter economic future.

The STEP process is simple: the leadership team meets to conduct a community assessment, prepare a vision statement for future development and discuss and decide on projects that will benefit the community as a whole.

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The N.C. Rural Economic Development Center is a private, nonprofit organization whose mission is to develop sound economic strategies that improve the quality of life in rural North Carolina, with a special focus on individuals with low to moderate incomes and communities with limited resources. The center operates a multifaceted program that includes conducting research into rural issues; testing promising rural development strategies; advocating for policy and program innovations; and building the productive capacity of rural leaders, entrepreneurs and community organizations.

For more information on the Rural Center, contact Garnet Bass, 919-250-4314